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SEPTEMBER 2009

Forward in Christ

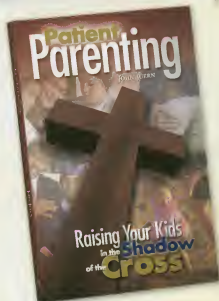
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Forward in Christ

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WITH OUR FATHERS;
MAY HE NEVER LEAVE US
NOR FORSAKE US.
1 Kings 8:57

EDITORIAL OFFICE

Forward in Christ magazine
WELS Communication Services
2929 N Mayfair Rd
Milwaukee WI 53222-4398
Phone: 414-256-3210
Fax: 414-256-3210
E-mail: fci@sab.wels.net
www.forwardinchrist.net

EXECUTIVE EDITOR

Rev. John A. Braun
braunj@nph.wels.net

MANAGING EDITOR

Julie K. Wietzke
julie.wietzke@sab.wels.net

ASSISTANT EDITOR

Alicia A. Neumann
alicia.neumann@sab.wels.net

STAFF WRITERS

Nicole R. Bolza
nicole.bolza@sab.wels.net
Laura C. Schaefer
laura.christine.schaefer@gmail.com

SEMINARY CONSULTANT

Prof. Daniel Leyrer

ART DIRECTOR

Karen Knutson

DESIGNER

Carriane Ciriacks

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POSTMASTER

Send address changes to Forward in Christ, c/o Northwestern Publishing House, 1250 N 113 St, Milwaukee WI 53226-3284.

Forward in Christ (ISSN 1541-8936) is published monthly through Northwestern Publishing House, 1250 N 113 St, Milwaukee WI 53226-3284. Periodical postage paid at Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

SUBSCRIPTION RATES

Individual: USA—\$16; Canada—\$16.95; all other countries—air mail \$48.40. Postage included, payable in advance to Northwestern Publishing House. Contact Northwestern Publishing House for multi-year, blanket, and bundle rates. Northwestern Publishing House, 1250 N 113 St, Milwaukee WI 53226-3284; 800-662-6093. Milwaukee area, 414-615-5785. www.nph.net/periodicals.

ON AUDIO

Mission for the Visually Impaired, 375 Bridgepoint Dr, South St. Paul, MN 55075; 651-291-1536.

SEPTEMBER

WHAT'S INSIDE

by Julie Wietzke

It's time for kids to go back to school. But did your kids take a break from learning all summer? Probably not. Education happens year-round, even when you—or your kids—might not expect it.

In talking about the importance of a Christian education for the next generation, Pastor Fred Kogler shares how planting a rose garden gave him an opportunity to talk to his grandson about things more important than flowers (p. 10). Our "Picture this" photo (p. 27) also shows a grandfather using the time he spends with his grandson to talk about Jesus and his love for his children.

As children grow up, parents have the challenge of letting go and trusting that God will continue to watch over those lives that they have tried to protect for years. In "Campus Cornerstone" (p. 18), Linda Liesener shares the struggles that she and her husband faced when their daughter decided she wanted to serve as a nurse with the Central Africa Medical Mission in Africa.

And remember, learning never ends. Pres. Schraeder reminds us of the importance of attending regular Bible study (p. 32). God's blessings as you and your children grow in him and his Word.

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KEEPING TEENS IN CHURCH

Re: Evaluating your congregation's confirmation practices [May]. The statement was made, "For years WELS churches have struggled to engage and retain teens once they are confirmed."

The reason that some of these teens are not retained after confirmation is quite simple. A lot of the parents are leaving their teens with the choice of whether or not they want to go to church.

I have two 13-year-olds, one seven-year-old, and two foster children. They have no choice of whether or not they want to go to church. . . . Our pastor did such a great job in teaching them the Bible that my wife stated that they almost got a seminary education.

Biblical illiteracy and ignorance of our Lutheran Confessions is totally inexcusable. We need to get back to teaching our Lutheran Confessions (which are the most accurate summaries of what the Bible teaches), not get away from them.

Either we catechize our children, or the world will do it!

Lloyd I. Codle
Buckeye, Arizona

FINANCIAL DIFFICULTIES

One of the truths—at least I hold it to be truth—is that any congregation [or synod] that is not experiencing some financial difficulties is not trying to do everything that it should be trying to do. Maybe we overreach at times—such as right now—but at least we are trying!

Richard Engelmann
Cincinnati, Ohio

A BOOK FOR ALL MEMBERS

Re: Book nook: Carrying one's cross [May]. I thank you for reviewing *The Theology of the Cross*. . . . I disagree with the opinion that "the book is appropriate for pastors, teachers, and lay leaders in congrega-

tions." It is appropriate for all Christians, certainly for pastors, teachers, and lay leaders, but especially for our members in the pews because "examples and dangers of cross bearing by the Christian are given for the young, the middle-aged, and those in their golden years." I pray that our publishing house and our congregations continue to promote this insightful and comforting work to every member of WELS.

Luke Boehringer
Owosso, Michigan

AD HOC Q&A

In regard to the interview with Danny Wehmeyer of the Ad Hoc Commission [June], interviews are always a tricky business. If they are transcribed with a bit of oversight, confusing things can be set straight.

When asked what areas the Ad Hoc Commission recommended we study, Mr. Wehmeyer cited, "The first is the efficacy (on) (sic) the means of grace." The following paragraph gave the impression that, at least to Mr. Wehmeyer's thinking, some put too much of an emphasis on the means of grace.

Then he turned the conversation to what might be a legitimate concern when speaking of sanctification: "But let's talk about what grace really means. . . . to which he concluded, "We need to keep on working." I'm not sure that gave our readers any better handle on the term "the efficacy of the means of grace"—much less, the doctrine.

Wayne A. Laitinen
New Ulm, Minnesota

STEM CELL RESEARCH

I would like to add to your discussion about stem cell research [July]. Embryonic stem cell research is immoral because it involves the destruction of babies. The advocates of this research try to frame the debate as a choice between ethics and saving

lives. This is a false choice. Despite federal funding, embryonic stem cells have yet to produce a single cure. Meanwhile, scientists working on cures that use nonembryonic stem cells have difficulty finding funding (*WORLD*, Feb. 5, 2005, 32-34). And even as limits on federal funding for embryonic stem cell research were removed, a U.S. biotechnology company began work with a Japanese university to reprogram human cells, which returns adult cells to an embryoniclike state (*Wall Street Journal*, April 14, 2009, B7). The reprogrammed cells have the characteristics of embryonic stem cells but do not require the destruction of embryos.

While God has allowed modern science to make marvelous leaps in curing diseases, full healing will not happen until the resurrection of the dead, when the perishable shall put on imperishable (1 Corinthians 15:42). No one can cure death, and [at] best human medicine can only put it off for a time.

Lauren Bernstein
Los Cruces, New Mexico

WORSHIP AND YOUTH

Just read the article "Voices of Youth" [October 2008]. It was interesting the different responses to our worship relating to "Why Young People Leave WELS." I felt the same way as some of the young people's comments about our church services. But as I've grown over the years, that boring, draggy hymn and the same old liturgy are so comforting and pleasurable and reassuring. I thank the Lord for bringing me to this faith and church body that gives me this pleasure and reassurance of his love.

Delphine Ebersole
Mesa, Arizona

Send your letters to *Feedback*, Forward in Christ, 2929 N Mayfair Rd, Milwaukee WI 53222; fic@sob.wels.net. Letters between 100 and 200 words are preferred. Include full name and address. Letters are edited for clarity, conciseness, and relevance. Not all letters received can be acknowledged or used. Writers' views are not necessarily those of WELS or Forward in Christ.

Real significance

At that time the disciples came to Jesus and asked, "Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" He called a little child and had him stand among them. And he said: "I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven." Matthew 18:1-4

James A. Mattek

It's natural for each of us to want to feel significant. From little on we crave feeling important to someone. A little boy beams when complimented by his dad. He might even act out to try to get his father's attention. He wants someone to think he's special. A woman glows with a peaceful joy as she is praised in a gathering of her friends. She feels significant. A husband's grin is an exhibition of satisfying peace as he is recognized for a job well done. He has made a difference in the eyes of someone. This human need is not only harmless, but it ends up as a building block in the richness of meaningful personal relationships.

Imagined significance

This need, however, can turn ugly . . . if not sinful. It happens when instead of being good and caring listeners, we manipulate the conversation so the spotlight is back on us. This is a subtle way to fabricate a feeling of personal significance.

This need can become ugly in other ways too. The chronic gossip does it often. He or she first attracts a crowd of hungry listeners and then feels superior to the person being gossiped about. Once again, it's a merely imagined significance that doesn't enhance relationships. It destroys them.

Jesus' disciples had the same needs. In their case it also got ugly. After three years of intensive seminary training at the feet of God's Son, they still didn't get "significance" right. In the upper room, within hours of Jesus' execution,

they got into a shouting match. They couldn't agree on which of them was the most significant. Earlier Mrs. Zebadee had come to Jesus about her two sons, James and John. Her request was that one son be Chief of Staff and the other his Secretary of State when Jesus set up his kingdom. This made the other disciples furious. In the pecking order of importance, they were being bumped to the back of the bus. My guess is that Jesus shook his head in frustration more than once.

People who artificially manufacture the appearance of significance and importance have an arrogance problem and a misunderstanding about the kingdom of God.

True significance

But Jesus turns everything on its head. "I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven."

True and godly significance has nothing to do with worldly status or recognition. Real significance has everything to do with recognizing our status before God. Before he kindly found us and made us his own, our status left us standing sinfully outside the impenetrable walls of his kingdom. Compare that sad and doomed status with where we stand now . . . secure



and safe within his glorious kingdom. We are adored and cared for by the One whose kingdom is not of this world. We look back at our former kingdom and are relieved that we are no longer there. We see the folly in fabricating our own importance to establish our own little kingdom.

We have a newfound and more meaningful significance. It's in realizing the great richness of our relationship with our saving God who considers us significant. It's a relationship that sees no need for a pecking order or a spotlight. In this relationship the spotlight is always on the One that is most significant.

Contributing editor James Mattek, chief executive officer at Wisconsin Lutheran Child & Family Service, is a member at Trinity, Watertown, Wisconsin.

Integrity

Joel V. Petermann

"The diplomat, who spoke on condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to talk to reporters . . ."

"They spoke on condition of anonymity because they did not want to be identified as discussing material that is sealed by a court order."

What? Did I read correctly? Confidential and sensitive information can be shared as long as it is done anonymously? Anonymity gives a green light to break a confidence?

Statements like these appear in newspapers, magazines, and online articles. Frankly they trouble me. They trouble me because they are symptomatic of an age when integrity is no longer considered important. Where is the integrity in sharing what has been shared with you in confidence? Where is the integrity in printing what you know to be confidential and restricted information?

What does *integrity* mean? The Merriam-Webster Dictionary lists three definitions: 1) firm adherence to a code of especially moral or artistic values; 2) an unimpaired condition; 3) the quality or state of being complete or undivided. The Old Testament words translated *integrity* in the NIV have a similar meaning. They come from words that mean "complete," "clean," "sound," "upright." Proverbs 11:3 says, "The integrity of the upright guides them, but the unfaithful are destroyed by their duplicity." The parallelism of this verse suggests that integrity and duplicity are opposites. Integrity, then, is not being false and deceptive. Integrity has to do with trustworthiness and being true. The New Testament word translated *integrity* is the word for being genuine. Someone once suggested that integrity is acting the same when people are not watching as when they are.

It's not just those whom newspapers interview who have trouble with integrity and sacrifice it

for anonymity. I even have trouble with it. I sacrifice integrity too. I know there are times when I have done what reflects badly on who I am as a Christian. When I was younger it was called peer pressure. Instead of doing what I knew was right, I sort of lost myself in the crowd and went along with the flow.

As we get older, that temptation is still there. In our technology age, perhaps it's even easier. I can go places on my computer that no one knows. I can write things without signing my name and send them out to all kinds of people. That's not integrity. "But no one knows," I think. God does. That's what troubles me. My sinful duplicity threatens to land me in the same eternal prison as the prince of duplicity.

How sweet it is then to read how Jesus' duplicitous opponents described my Savior: "Teacher, . . . we know you are a man of integrity and that you teach the way of God in accordance with the truth. You aren't swayed by men, because you pay no attention to who they are" (Matthew 22:16). Jesus was always genuine. He was true to who he was—God's perfect Son. He lived the integrity that I lack. On the cross he gave that perfect life for my imperfection. The truth conquered the lie and freed me from the damnation of duplicity.

He now has called me to a life of integrity. He has called me to live in the truth. His Spirit helps me to see that I am a Christian no matter who is watching. Anonymity is no excuse for letting down my guard. My prayer—and I hope yours too—is this: "Lord Jesus, help me to live a life worthy of the calling I have received—whether others are watching or not."

Contributing editor Joel Petermann is pastor at St. Paul, Amherst, New Hampshire.

**His Spirit helps me to see
that I am a Christian no
matter who is watching.
Anonymity is no excuse for
letting down my guard.**

QUESTION & ANSWER



Forrest L. Bivens

With your question you shared the comment that in the church we seem to use the term *offend* differently than most people do. You're right. But no matter how we use the word, the general subject and its biblical basis remain important.

Spiritual offense is serious business

Offense, in a theological or religious sense, is far more serious than offending someone by showing a lack of politeness, wounding their feelings, or causing resentment and anger by something we have done. In "church talk" an offense is something that may lead a person into unbelief or erring belief or cause them to continue to sin in some way. Because it is a snare or obstacle placed in someone's path to eternal life, it's quite serious. Jesus spoke of this in Matthew 18:6-9.

Giving or taking spiritual offense

It is possible for people to "give" or cause offense and also to "take" offense or be offended. Christians may give offense by an unloving use of Christian freedom in matters neither commanded nor forbidden by God. As brothers and sisters in Christ, we are to consider what effect our actions will have on the weak or ill-informed. (See Romans 14:13-15 and 1 Corinthians 8:9-13 for advice on this.) Offense may also be given by false teaching (the term is used in Romans 16:17), unchristian actions and lifestyle (Romans 2:23,24), or by neglecting to act as a child of God should (Galatians 2:11-14). In short, it is sinning in such a way that we not only harm ourselves but also others who are tempted to follow our example and be harmed spiritually.

Being offended is falling prey to temptation or being led into sin. The spiritually weak and immature are most often the victims. The similar term *taking offense* is used differently, most often when people treat an acceptable action in a prejudiced way and are lovelessly judgmental about someone else's words or actions. Taking offense is stumbling in the faith

Q. What do we mean when we say people "offend" others or "are offended" by them?

or falling into sin not so much because of a bad example or false teaching of someone else but because one finds fault with someone else's words or actions or tries to shift the blame from his or her own failings.

A related question quickly surfaces here: how can we determine if offense is being given or taken in a particular case? Generally speaking, all I can say is we must be careful, cautious, and loving. Those personally involved in the situation will need to use God-given discernment as they take note of what happened and how it played out. Removing whatever causes sin and whatever would lead to impenitence and unbelief is the top priority.

Our personal agenda

"Woe to the world because of the things that cause people to sin! Such things must come, but woe to the man through whom they come!" (Matthew 18:7). In this world spiritual stumbling blocks are inevitable and unavoidable. Identifying and reacting to them will remain on our agenda as believers in Jesus Christ.

We are not talking about the Christian's witness and life, which will cause some to be offended. Christ and his gospel, as well as believers who are faithful to him, are "offenses" to those who will not believe (Galatians 5:11; Romans 9:33; and 1 Peter 2:8). We desire others to know of Jesus, but we should not give offense by our words and actions so that it causes others to sin (1 Corinthians 10:31,32). What's most important will remain so: daily repentance with reliance on Jesus and a renewed resolve to honor God and serve our neighbor.

Contributing editor Forrest Bivens, a professor at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wisconsin, is a member at Calvary, Thiensville.

A young boy with brown hair, wearing a bright yellow t-shirt, light-colored shorts, and green rubber boots, is watering a rose bush. He is holding a blue watering can and pouring water onto the base of a rose plant. The scene is outdoors, with a path and other plants visible in the background.

Grandpa's rose garden

Planting a rose garden provides an opportunity for a grandfather to share more than just his love for flowers.

Frederick A. Kogler

I was sitting with several men who were about the same age as I was. Most of them had silver-gray hair if they had any at all. We were discussing the general state of affairs in our various churches and in our country.

Gradually, we got around to talking about the future, and I asked questions about what was most important to them at this point in their lives. One responded, "The education of my grandchildren." Most around the table responded by nodding their heads in agreement.

I agreed, "Yes, it's really important that our grandchildren get college educations these days."

That, however, was not what they had in mind. One objected, "No, I didn't mean a college education, but a Christian education." Another grandpa, looking at me over his glasses, seemed somewhat surprised by my comment and said, "No, I want to see my children and my grandchildren in heaven." Still another added, "They need to know about Jesus." I was glad to hear that we shared the same objective.

The world is growing older

One of the most important demographics in today's world is little discussed: not only is the world getting older with each tick of the clock, but so are its people. In fact, in an unprecedented way, the people of the world are living longer, more robust lives than in any preceding generation. U.S. Census Bureau's statistics indicate that our nation will

soon be a nation that has more people over 65 than under the age of 18. Even though we are a growing nation, we are becoming a larger older nation rather than a larger younger one.

This raises important questions for all of us, especially for us grandfathers who dearly love the Lord Jesus and our grandchildren. What shall we do to serve the Lord and help our grandchildren keep and grow in their faith?

A small rose garden

Almost coincidentally, it became clear what the Lord had in mind for at least this grandpa.

For several years I had wanted to add a small rose garden to our front yard. Each spring I put it off because I was "too busy" and because the project was going to be difficult. But I decided I had to do something about my dream. I walked to the neighbor's house, borrowed his monster garden tiller, rolled it to our front yard, checked the oil, filled it with gas, and set about the task of "creating" a new rose bed.

It wasn't too long after I started that I realized that I could use some help. As I broke the sod and penetrated to the next level, I ran into more rocks and stones than I had imagined. My wife, who had been sympathetically watching, joined in and lent a hand by picking the rocks out for me. Soon, she too felt the strain of it, and we languished a bit. Taking a break for a glass of water, I commented, "Too bad I don't have the strength I used to have. What we need around here is a little help."

We sighed out loud and rose stiffly to resume our work. We chugged, bounced, jolted, pushed, pulled, and used muscles we forgot we had. But we picked our way along until we had prepared and shaped the bed. Phase one complete! But it had taken longer than I expected, and I was tired out.

A little help

I asked my wife, "Do you think I could get Jordon to come over and

help me out?" My grandson Jordon is nine years old. He loves sports; watches the weather channel with great interest; and, in my opinion, plays video games too much. "Maybe Katie would like to get him out of her hair for a while, and I could show him how to plant these roses."

My wife was already on the phone. By the time I pushed the tiller back to the neighbor's garden, it was all set up. Jordon had just finished soccer practice, and since his sister was off to swimming lessons, his mother had declared, "He was looking for something to do. Give him a few cookies and a glass of milk, and he's yours for the afternoon."

Before I could get to my afternoon nap, the cavalry arrived. "Hey, Grandpa. What's up?"

"Hey, Buddy. How'd you like to help me plant some roses?"

"I guess so," was his less-than-enthusiastic response. I could almost hear him thinking: "I gave up playing with my new video game for planting roses! Whatever."

As I looked at him, I knew that my project was no longer about establishing a new rose garden. The Lord had given me an opportunity to declare his power to the next generation. My longstanding dream of having a rose bed in my front yard, notwithstanding, I really got excited about teaching my grandson about God's great goodness displayed in the beautiful roses. The fire of double love was rekindled in my heart and mind, and I was ready to go!

I had laid out the bed so that eight new bare root plants would nicely fit together for the winterization process that I've learned to call "Minnesota tipping." As we began to dig the holes for the roses, I explained the importance of planting roses at the proper depth. I showed him the bud union, helped him visualize the ground line, and described how we would plant each rose.

Wearing heavy garden gloves designed for my hands, my young gardener helped mix the root stimulator at the proper ratio. I explained ratios—3 to 1 means that for every three units of one thing there is one unit of another. Jordon remarked, "God must really be smart to figure all this stuff out."

I dug a little deeper. "You know, Jordon, God is much smarter than we think," I said. "Not only does he know how to make plants grow, he also knows how to make us grow. That's why we have the Bible. What it shows us about God is that he's not only smart but that he loves us as well."

He thought for a while, and then said, "That's why he sent Jesus to die on the cross, right?"

I said, "Yes, that's the best example of God's love for us, isn't it?"

"Yup," he said, almost inaudibly. "Should I put some more 'root stuff' on the plant?" Silently I prayed, "Lord, keep him in his faith forever, please."

"No, not now," I said. "Let's put some more dirt around it so it can stand on its own."

We finished our job just in time for some special chocolate chip cookies and milk. Grandma was watching us, and her timing was perfect.

Jordon went home but stopped by with his dad a few days later. He wanted to make sure that his father saw the rose garden he planted at Grandpa's house. As soon as he could get out of the van, he came running over to me. "How's our rose garden doing, Grandpa?" he asked. "Do you want me to water them?"

"Thank you, Lord, for our common faith and rose bed kinship," I prayed.

A tear of joy helped water the roses that day.

Frederick Kogler is pastor at Emmanuel, Hudson, Wisconsin.

PORNOGRAPHY

is out of place



God has given us our sexuality, and it has an important place in our lives. But Satan has taken God's gift and made it into a raging, destructive force in our society today.

Lance A. Hoff

Part of God's beautiful creation is that intimate, sensuous, physical attraction of a man and his wife. God finds no shame in the loving relationship of a man and his wife. But it is difficult to talk about it. Parents are afraid to talk about it with their children, and once children understand, they find that it is difficult to discuss it with their parents as well.

On the other hand, sex outside of marriage—illicit, immoral sex that God unconditionally and roundly condemns as pornographic—finds expression almost everywhere. I challenge you to sit in front of your TV some evening and to switch channels every time God's view of sexuality is mocked or becomes the cause of laughter. You may need new batteries for your remote. We don't blush at the misuse of sex. Yet we blush when God speaks of the pure love of husband and wife!

Our blushers are all mixed up. We become products of our society rather than products of God's good will. The Holy Spirit can lead us to get our blushers in sync with God's when we listen to what the Bible says about our sexuality. God has given us our sexuality and given it an important place in our lives. In God's place, it is not lewd, vulgar, or indecent. But pornography is all of that.

What is out of place

The apostle Paul clearly states God's position: "Among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God's holy people. Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking, which are out of place" (Ephesians 5:3,4). Paul covers all the bases quite thoroughly. God wants us to live our lives in such a way that no one could even suspect us of having any

part in pornography or sexual impurity. The attitude God requires is not, "Okay, God says it is a no-no, so I'll go as far as I can without going all the way." Nor is the attitude of the Christian, "It is nobody's business what we do as consenting adults." No. God says, "Not even a hint of sexual immorality."

Don't even joke about it. Paul condemns coarse gutter talk, including the "F-word." That's out of place, he says. That's the talk of fools. But some have argued that it is okay if such talk is done in a clever, funny, sophisticated fashion.

Others look to celebrities as role models for our sexuality. Consider such examples as *Playboy* and many television shows. "No," says Paul, not that kind of sophisticated joking either. Adultery used to be one of the seven deadly sins; now it is the acceptable way for a comedian to get laughs. Have no part of it. Pornography in any shape or form is out of place. Period. "Do not be partners with them," Paul reminds us (Ephesians 5:7).

The apostle adds a warning: "Let no one deceive you with empty words" (verse 6). God's Word is clear; but men's words are deceptive . . . very deceptive. God has made it perfectly clear that immorality in every shape and form has no place among Christians or in marriage. Our world has been deceived by the "new morality." It is bad enough that society accepts immorality. But even prominent Protestant, Lutheran, and Catholic theologians today promote distorted sexuality. In fact, entire denominations have officially accepted immorality in various forms. No one talks about fornication anymore; we have "meaningful relationships" and "alternate lifestyles." We do not mention the word *spouse* anymore lest we offend those not married or those who have abandoned God's pattern

for marriage—one man and one woman. Instead we speak of “significant others.” The talk is deceptive.

Have you found yourself confused and wondering because of the deceptive arguments of people? One article of 1,200 words isn’t going to clear up all those deceptions. But God can. Spend the time you might spend with Oprah or Judge Judy in your Bible, and you will find the truth.

God’s harsh law and sweet gospel

Why is God so harsh on immorality? An obvious answer is because of the damage that pornography can do to a marriage. God gave marriage as the very foundation of society. But immorality has left a sad trail of broken lives in its wake. Rapes, murders, incest and abuse, broken marriages, and defrocked clergy are fueled by pornography. A warped and perverted view of women is promoted by the *Playboy* philosophy. Sex is used to sell everything from coffee to cars. A careful look at our society leaves no question as to why our loving God insists “not even a hint of sexual immorality.”

But there is a far more important reason for God’s view. It is what the whole book of Ephesians is about: being a part of God’s family. Here the apostle speaks to both sides of us, for the Christian is a divided person. To that old sinful flesh within—that part of us that is apt to have been laughing and making excuses for our sins even while reading this—the apostle says, “For of this you can be sure: No immortal, impure or greedy person—such a man is an idolater—has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God . . . because of such things God’s wrath comes on those who are disobedient” (Ephesians 5:5,6).

That’s the only language the sinful flesh listens to. Unless the sinful nature is hit on the side of the head with a two-by-four, it will go on making excuses and thinking that all the bad guys are in jail. God wants us to realize that sexual immorality is spiritual idolatry. We

choose to think immorality is more important than what God says. If left without repentance, he will throw us into the gutter where we belong.


But the apostle appeals also to our new self—our faith in Jesus. He simply and quietly says, “These are improper for God’s holy people” (Ephesians 5:3). That’s all he needs to say. We know what this means. It immediately calls to mind how for eternity our God has loved each of us . . . and how through his Son he reached down and took us out of the gutter and by grace made us his dear precious children. He promised to live within us. We are his temples. The lives of believers are to be pure and godly. We are in fact princes and princesses of the Creator of the universe.

Our sexuality is like fire. When kept in its place like the burner in our furnaces, fire is a wonderful thing on a cold day. But once it gets out of its place, nothing is more destructive. Our sexuality kept in its place is a satisfying warmth in marriage. But Satan has let the fire out of its place and fanned it into a raging, destructive force in our society today. This Word of God is a smoke alarm. I hope no one sleeps through it!

Lonca Hoff is pastor at St. Peter, Helenville, Wisconsin.

This is the third article in a six-part series on marriage. To read other articles in the series, go to www.forwardinchrist.net and search by the author’s first and last name.





"I am genetically Catholic," jokes Rodrigo Concha. Originally from Chile, Rodrigo grew up in a country where Catholicism dominates the religious scene. In his teenage years, however, he started questioning the teachings of the church.

Rodrigo's quest to find answers eventually led him to a WELS church in the United States. After his first visit there in 2000, he recalls, "I was so inspired; I needed to tell everyone about it."

Telling everyone is just what he's working on today. Rodrigo and his family currently reside in New Ulm, Minn., where he is studying to become a pastor. He's also involved in Hispanic outreach in the area.

Early years

Although Rodrigo went to Mass with his family as a child, he didn't find a spiritual home in the Roman Catholic Church. "When I became a teenager, I started questioning things," he says. "It came to the point where all of my Catholic friends were getting confirmed and I decided,

'No, I cannot profess a faith that I have so many questions with.'"

Rodrigo started turning to other sources to fill his spiritual void. "I believe the Lord uses every tool he has to guide you," he says. "One of the things that kept me focused in Christ as a brother, as a Savior, and as a Man that came lovingly to save no matter what you did was the movie *Jesus Christ Superstar*." Shortly after it hit the screens, it became his favorite film.

"Once I became a little freer of the bonds of family obligations, I started searching for some sort of truth, and I went to everything," Rodrigo says. His journey led him to different religions, including a stint with Hinduism. "I always liked Eastern philosophy and in some ways the Native American philosophy—the contact with nature and self—because I never had the spiritual life that I was supposed to have with the Catholic Church," he says. "I was searching to fill that gap in my heart, looking for that spiritual center that I didn't have growing up."

Moving to the United States

Rodrigo moved to the United States in 1981. When he arrived, he returned to the Catholic Church for awhile. "I went, but it was out of a

Confessions of faith

Why are you a member of WELS? What does this church body have that makes it unique from hundreds of others? In this series, you will read about why some choose to join WELS and what members treasure most about being WELS.

Rachel Hartman

need for a spiritual center," he says. "I knew I didn't belong there."

When Rodrigo and his wife-to-be, Sandra, wanted to get married, they again turned to the Catholic Church. Since Rodrigo was not confirmed, the priest insisted that he take confirmation classes. After three classes, Rodrigo realized he did not agree with the teachings. The priest told him that the two could get married but asked Rodrigo not to come to any more classes.

Rodrigo again ran into problems when his first son was born. The Catholic Church would not baptize the child unless the godparents were Catholic. When his second child was born, Rodrigo decided to look somewhere else for the baptism.

Around this time, a letter arrived in the mail. It came from Christ Redeemer Lutheran Church, one of the two WELS churches in Connecticut. "It was congratulating us on the birth of our son and offering to help with anything we might need," says Rodrigo. "Like a good Catholic, I couldn't throw away anything with a cross on it, so I put it on the refrigerator."

It stayed there for about six months. Rodrigo says, "Then I said to my wife, 'We have to baptize that kid.'" So Rodrigo dialed the number for the church. A woman answered and gave Rodrigo a lasting first impression. "It was like calling my grandmother," he says. "Her voice was like a hug, and the way she spoke got right to my heart."

She said the church would be happy to baptize Rodrigo's son. Shortly after that, the pastor called and set up a date for the baptism.

The process seemed easy—almost too easy. Rodrigo started to worry that something might be wrong with the church: "I told my wife we should go and check it out." They showed up for a Sunday and received a warm welcome from the members. "Everyone was so friendly," he says. "It was like we were the new guy at the party, and



Rodrigo Concha receives his diploma from Rev. Mark Zarling, president of Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn.

everyone wanted to know how much fun we were bringing."

Then the service started. When the sermon came, Rodrigo was thunderstruck. "Here was the pastor teaching law and gospel right from the Bible—no frills, no extras. That's what I believed!"

During his years of searching for the truth, Rodrigo had formed his own version of Christianity. "I believed in Christ and that everything in the Bible is true. But for many years I was convinced I was a lunatic that made his own religion," he says. "Here I found myself surrounded by people that believed exactly the way I felt. If you've ever been under a boulder and had it lifted from you—that's how I felt. I could've flown that day."

Rodrigo and his family stayed for fellowship and Bible study. "People kept asking us questions, and I'd respond, 'We're from Bridgeport, and we're here to baptize our child.' Suddenly, I found myself adding, 'and to convert.'"

To this day, Rodrigo says that he is not sure where the words came from, but they were from the heart. One month later, he was enrolled in Bible information classes. Forty

weeks after that, he was confirmed at the age of 42.

Paving new paths

For Rodrigo, it didn't end there. In fact, finding a Lutheran church was just the beginning. He soon decided he wanted to be involved in full-time ministry. He and his family moved to New Ulm, Minn., where he studied at Martin Luther College for four years.

He also began to do Hispanic outreach in the area through a grant from WELS Kingdom Workers. "I help immigrants with physical, 'this-world' needs. I also help them with their spiritual needs," he says. Rodrigo speaks both English and Spanish fluently. He also understands life in Chile, where he grew up, as well as the United States, where he has lived since 1981.

These qualities help him to serve as a bridge between the two cultures.

Rodrigo plans to enroll in the Pastoral Studies Institute, a branch of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary set up for nontraditional students. This will allow Rodrigo and his family to stay in New Ulm. While he studies to become a pastor, Rodrigo plans to continue his ongoing ministry in the communities surrounding New Ulm.

Looking back on his life, Rodrigo has no regrets. "It's a journey, and God guided me through each turn to bring me here. He found me and brought me to where I needed to be. That is just amazing."

Rodrigo is so happy to have found a church that believes what he does and is eager to use his gifts to help others. Most of all, he wants others to know about Jesus Christ. "I offer my services to people for free. I tell them, 'It's free, just like what Jesus did for you.'"

Rochel Hartman serves with her husband, Missionary Michael Hartman, in Torreón, Mexico.

Do you have a story to share about how you became a WELS member? Send it to Forward in Christ, 2929 N. Mayfair Rd., Milwaukee WI 53222; fic@sob.wels.net.

GODS



Where is God when tragedy strikes? What is he doing?

Mark J. Lenz

Perhaps as many as 100,000 people have died in Sri Lanka since war began there in 1983. Since 2003 at least 300,000 people have died in Darfur at the hands of the Bashir government. Upwards of 2 million people have died in Sudan in a civil war that has lasted 20 years. As many as 50 million babies have been aborted in our own country since *Roe vs. Wade* in 1973. Rogue nations today are testing missiles and nuclear weapons and threatening to use them. Countless examples of evil exist in the world. There are murders, kidnappings, rapes, extortions, robberies, and many more. And God concurs in all of them.

Wait a minute! How dare we say something like that? Isn't it blasphemous even to suggest something like that?

The word *concur* literally means "to act together to a common end or a single effect." With that definition in mind, it is indeed proper to say that God concurs in, that is, he goes along with, everything that happens, even everything that is evil.

God forbids evil

That doesn't mean God approves of evil. On the contrary, God clearly forbids evil. In the Ten Commandments, God says, "You shall not murder . . . commit adultery . . . steal . . ." Through his prophet Isaiah he says, "Stop doing wrong" (Isaiah 1:16) and "Let the wicked forsake his way and the evil man his thoughts" (55:7). The writer to the Hebrews says, "Let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles" (12:1). The apostle Peter writes, "Dear friends, I urge you . . . to abstain from sinful desires" (1 Peter 2:11). There's no toleration of evil in the Bible. There's absolutely no *laissez-faire* attitude about sin and wickedness.

God prevents evil

When we say that God concurs in evil, we don't mean that God wills evil or that he wants evil. In fact, God frequently prevents evil from happening. By appearing to him in a dream, God prevented the Philistine king Abimelech from taking Abraham's wife, Sarah, as his wife (Genesis 20:6). In order to prevent further evil, God, in Old Testament times, repeatedly commanded that murderers, fornicators, kidnappers, and others be put to death. Who knows how many wars, how many crimes, how many terrorist acts, how many plane crashes, how many car accidents, and how many other evil acts and tragedies God has prevented over the years.

Evil always serves God's purposes

Even when evil does happen, we can be certain that God always governs it so that it serves his purposes. Wars, genocide, terrorist attacks, crimes, sudden deaths—as hard as it may be for us to understand—God causes all of these things to serve his purpose.

An example is the story of Joseph. Because they were jealous and envious, Joseph's brothers were determined to kill him. They threw him into a pit, sold him into slavery, and told their father that Joseph must surely have been killed by a wild beast. It's hard to imagine how much more evil they could have devised. Several years later when Joseph had become prime minister of Egypt, his brothers came to Egypt to buy food. Joseph eventually revealed himself as their brother and said to them, "You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives" (Genesis 50:20). God used the hatred, the animosity, the rejection, the deception—as evil as all of that was—to serve his purpose.

EVIL

The apostle Paul wrote, "We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose" (Romans 8:28). Even in times of sickness, pain, poverty, or whatever terrible thing there might be, God is at work to bring about his good purposes for his people. It may not always be clear to us—sometimes it won't be clear this side of heaven—but we can be absolutely certain that God is in control and that his good purposes are being accomplished.

But how does God concur in evil?

God forbids evil, he often prevents evil, and he always uses evil to serve his good purposes. But maybe it still doesn't seem right to say that God concurs in evil. What does that mean exactly? Perhaps the problem lies with how we use the word *concur*. We sometimes understand it to mean "to approve or to express agreement." God certainly doesn't approve of evil or agree with it. Moses wrote, "[God's] works are perfect, and all his ways are just. A faithful God who does no wrong, upright and just is he" (Deuteronomy 32:4). To say that God concurs in evil does not mean that he is the author of evil or an accomplice in evil. Satan, not God, is the author of evil and the one who regularly causes evil to happen.

How then does God concur in evil? Although in many ways it remains a mystery, we can say that God goes along with evil acts insofar as they are acts, but not insofar as they are evil. God goes along with the effect of evil actions but never the defect of those actions. Paul told the people of Athens, "In [God] we live and move and have our being" (Acts 17:28). That's true of all people of all time—believers and unbelievers. None of us could put one foot in front of the other, none of us could inhale or exhale, none of us could

exist for one instant, if God were not concurring. That means that God concurs when a person walks into a bank to make a deposit and when another walks in to rob the bank. Both live, breathe, walk, and talk because God concurs in those actions. If he didn't concur, they would both cease to be. God goes along with the actions, but only to the extent that they are actions, not in that they are evil. The bank robber is totally responsible for his evil actions. God is not.

God permits evil

Sometimes God's concurrence in evil is spoken of as permission. Permission doesn't mean that God gives people a license to sin. It doesn't mean that God wills the evil he permits. He doesn't wish it, he doesn't want it, but yet it happens. He permits sinners to rush headlong into the sins they have chosen to commit. We can consider God's permission as a kind of negative action; he takes no action.

The most evil thing that has ever happened in the history of the world was the death of the Son of God. Think of it. He who came to earth to save mankind was rejected, denied, betrayed, falsely accused, scourged, and finally put to death on a cross. What could be more evil than that? And yet God concurred in every bit of it. None of it could have happened if God had not permitted it. It all happened so that our sins might be paid for. Is it blasphemous to say that God concurred in the death of his Son? No, it's the most wonderful thing that has ever happened in the history of the world.

Mark Lenz, a professor at Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minnesota, is a member at St. John, New Ulm.

This is the second article in a three-part series on God's providence. Find a related Bible study on this topic after Sept. 5 at www.forwardinchrist.net



Linda Liesener

Letting go

We are only caretakers of the children placed in our homes.
They are God's children, and he has plans for each of them.

The phone rings: "Mom . . . I have been thinking, and I really want to go to Africa and be part of the Central Africa Medical Mission. We have so much here in the States, and I think the Lord wants me to use my abilities elsewhere. Are you and Dad okay with that?"

We pray and ask the Lord to direct us to spread his gospel message. But what if that means our son or daughter? What if that means traveling to the other side of the world? Does praying for mission workers mean praying that it is okay for someone else's son or daughter to work in Africa and praying that our child only serve within 50 miles of our home? "Come, follow me, . . . and I will make you fishers of men" (Mark 1:17). Can we pray with restrictions where our children go to serve the Lord?

As parents, we always planned ahead to protect our children from dangers and illnesses. We remember holding our daughter Alicia's hands to prevent falls or scraped knees. But her phone call created so many questions—so many unknowns. Where would she live? What illnesses could she be exposed to?

What would happen if she got seriously ill? Would she be safe? Could we express our concerns without dampening her enthusiasm? Would it be our words that would hinder the work of the Holy Spirit?

It seemed like just a few years ago when she left for the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Soon after school began, Wisconsin Lutheran Chapel sent us a devotional booklet entitled *In His Hands*. The ten short

devotions in the booklet centered on trusting in God's care for his children and helped us as parents keep everything in perspective. The pages have been worn a bit since its arrival.

The devotion entitled "Witnessing" seemed fitting after her call. In 2 Kings 5:1-14, a young girl from Israel was taken captive to a faraway land to serve the wife of Naaman, who was riddled with leprosy. The young girl used the opportunity to witness and tell Naaman of Elisha, God's prophet. She suggested that the God of Israel, whom Elisha served, could cure Naaman of his disease. The young girl's words brought Naaman to Elisha for healing of the body and the soul. In a similar manner, the devotion suggested, "Your son or daughter has the opportunity to speak to others about 'the God who forgives all sins, who heals all diseases, who rescues one's life from the pit.'"

The years go by quickly as we nurture our children and guide them to be good stewards of their time and talents. We know we are only caretakers of the children placed in our homes. They are God's children, and he has plans for each of them. God prepares each child as he or she continues on the journey of life. God had prepared Alicia and us to answer "yes" in support of her desire to serve the Lord in Africa.

The words "Your will be done" in the Lord's Prayer are not for our earthly desires but for the Lord's. As parents, we need to pray and trust that he will work out all things for the good of his beloved children, and we need to let go—to entrust our children into his care. Our role is to be supportive and look heavenward, knowing that God loves each child more than we are capable.

When you pray to send workers into the harvest field, open your heart and know that his plans may include you or your children.

Linda Liesener is a member at David's Star, Jackson, Wisconsin.

Alicia Liesener Cartright served with the Central Africa Medical Mission in Malawi from 2004-2007.

A gift for any occasion

Looking for a low-cost gift for a relative, friend, or neighbor? Why not feed their souls as well as their minds with *Forward in Christ* magazine. This \$16 gift is good for every month of the year:

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To order a gift subscription, call Northwestern Publishing House today at 1-800-662-6093 or order online at www.nph.net/periodicals.



Sovereignty of God

de·fin·ing
re·li·gion

God's supreme, autonomous power and rule over the universe. Everything is ultimately subject to him, and he makes everything work out for the benefit of his people (Psalm 115:3; Ephesians 1:19-23; Philippians 2:9-11; Romans 8:28).

Hell —

the place of torment prepared for the devil and his evil angels where unbelievers will suffer forever (Matthew 25:41,46; John 3:16-18; Luke 16:22,23; Mark 9:42-48).

Through my Bible

IN 3 YEARS

10/2009

1. 1 Kings 9:1-10:13
2. 1 Kgs. 10:14-11:43
3. 1 Kgs. 12:1-32
4. 1 Kgs. 12:33-13:34
5. 1 Kgs. 14
6. 1 Kgs. 15:1-16:7
7. 1 Kgs. 16:8-34
8. 1 Kgs. 17, 18
9. 1 Kgs. 19
10. 1 Kgs. 20
11. 1 Kgs. 21
12. 1 Kgs. 22
13. John 1:1-18
14. Jn. 1:19-34
15. Jn. 1:35-51
16. Jn. 2:1-22

17. Jn. 2:23-3:21
18. Jn. 3:22-36
19. Jn. 4:1-26
20. Jn. 4:27-54
21. Jn. 5:1-29
22. Jn. 5:30-47
23. Jn. 6:1-21
24. Jn. 6:22-40
25. Jn. 6:41-71
26. Jn. 7:1-24
27. Jn. 7:25-52
28. Jn. 7:53-8:29
29. Jn. 8:30-59
30. Jn. 9
31. Jn. 10:1-21

Sharing our mission

A new look for *Forward in Christ*, a redesigned Web site, and a new intro for *WELS Connection*—these are just a few things you'll notice in the next few months as the new WELS identity, Christ's Love, Our Calling, is introduced to the synod. According to Joel Hochmuth, director of communications, this initiative isn't just about a new look; it's how WELS is sharing its mission with the world.

"This new synod identity seeks to present our church body to the members and nonmembers in the most positive way possible," he says.

The identity is best summarized in the new synod logo, which carries the tagline Christ's Love, Our Calling. "Together, a new tagline and logo will help us focus attention on who we are—God's people through

The new WELS logo.



Christ's love—and our mission, or calling," says Hochmuth.

This initiative is the result of several meetings among synod administrators beginning in May 2008. "The meetings explored ways to address the perceptions that many inside and outside WELS hold of our church body," says Hochmuth. "It was agreed that we must once again clearly articulate the tremendous blessings we enjoy as a synod and as individual Christians."

WELS President Mark Schroeder, who was also part of those meetings,

says the new identity is especially meaningful given the challenges currently facing the synod: "In times like this, we have to remind ourselves that no matter how things look around us, Christ's love is all around us; it doesn't change, and it doesn't go away."

That sentiment will be reflected in synodical publications and materials in upcoming months as they are redesigned, with the help of grant dollars, to include the new logo. Congregations are also encouraged to use the new logo, which was first introduced at the synod convention in July. For information about logo usage or how to download a copy, contact WELS Communication Services at csc@sab.wels.net or 414-256-3210.

For more on the new synod identity, check out October's *WELS Connection*.



Let your light shine

In the spirit of Matthew 5:16, we're sharing examples of people who live their faith. May they inspire you to let your light shine even brighter.

On May 23, Brian "B.J." Webb Jr., a Wisconsin Lutheran High School (Wisco) junior and member of Atonement, Milwaukee, Wis., was taken to his home in heaven as a result of injuries he sustained in an automobile accident. Several weeks before his accident, B.J. wrote a short response in his English class to the statement "Fair is whatever God wants to do." This response was shared with Wisco students following the accident as well as used at B.J.'s funeral service. The writing below is a testament to B.J.'s faith in his Savior.

"Fair is whatever God wants to do." I think that this quote is a very true statement because even though at times we may not like what God allows to happen to us and we think that he is mad at us or trying to punish us, we have to remember that God is in control and that he

has our best interest in mind. So we have no right to tell God what is fair or unfair because he is in control and has the power to do anything he wants, for God gives but he can also take away. Who are we to say we are being treated

unfairly when God sent his one and only Son to come from heaven to earth, to be humiliated and ridiculed by us and to finally suffer and die on a cross when he had never done anything wrong in his life. So I think that if anyone knows what is fair or unfair it is God. It is unfair for us as sinners to even be able to pray and give praise to God because we are so unworthy, but it is his unending love and amazing grace that allows us to have the privilege of claiming him as our God. So I think it is true that "Fair is whatever God wants to do."—B.J. Webb Jr.



B.J. Webb Jr.

Reprinted from WLHS Contact, July 2009

HOPE in Washington

Light of Life, Covington, Wash., is a home mission congregation that began worship services in November 2003. Of its 130 members, 45 are under the age of 12. Light of Life offers a thriving preschool program. Yet after preschool, most children attend a public elementary school.

"A few parents asked if there was anything we could do to supplement the Christian education done in Sunday school," says Jared Oldenburg, pastor at Light of Life. "Three of the parents who asked had their children in our preschool and saw the benefits of regular instruction about Jesus. We started a pilot program called HOPE—Helping Our Parents Educate—with the idea of assisting our parents in their callings to train up their children in the way of the Lord."

HOPE is based on Northwestern Publishing House's *Christ-Light* curriculum, which offers Bible lessons and memory books for Sunday school and Lutheran elementary school students. Oldenburg developed a parent's guide to go along with the *Christ-Light* curriculum and encouraged parents to teach their children one lesson each week. About once a month all the

families reviewed the lessons at church with games, a craft, prizes, retelling of the lessons, and a review of the memory work.

Matt and Tzeitel Lorette, members at Light of Life and parents of six-year-old Gabe and four-year-old Madeline, appreciated the instruction and support that they received from HOPE. As Tzeitel explains, "Our kids will attend public school, and they love Sunday school. So we thought HOPE would be another great avenue for them to hear God's Word. The most important thing Matt and I learned is that Gabe and Madeline are always wanting to hear more Bible stories. We also appreciated meeting with the other parents for ideas to try the following month."

Oldenburg says that Light of Life will again offer HOPE this school year. The program will undergo some changes after feedback following its first year, but the goal is the same—teaching children about their Savior.



Families at Light of Life, Covington, Wash., meet at church each month to review *Christ-Light* lessons that parents teach their children at home.

Christ-Light 2

Northwestern Publishing House is currently working on a revision of the *Christ-Light* curriculum, which has a tentative release date of the 2012–2013 school year. Two new topical Bible studies for seventh- and eighth-grade students will be released for the 2010–2011 school year: "What Is Truth?" and "Chosen by God: A Bible Study on 1 and 2 Peter."

For more information, visit www.nph.net/CL2.

WELS news briefs

Board for World Missions

414-256-3233; bwm@sab.wels.net



The Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Church of Mexico, one of WELS' sister synods, welcomed two new congregations into membership at its 18th annual convention, held in July in Mexico City. The congregations—*El Buen Pastor* (Good Shepherd), Altar, Sonora, and *Cordero de Dios* (Lamb of God), Sásabe, Sonora—both began through Mission

to the Children, a WELS-affiliated humanitarian aid group that has been delivering food and basic essentials to villages in Sonora for 20 years and currently is served by a WELS missionary. The national church body also called two home missionaries to the state of Sonora to work with the new congregations as well as other preaching stations. Pictured is Jesús Vega (right), president of the church body, shaking hands with Benjamín Valenzuela, a delegate from *Cordero de Dios*, officially welcoming the congregation into fellowship with the Mexican Lutheran church.

Ministry of Christian Giving 800-827-5482; mcg@sab.wels.net

The Year of Jubilee offering, authorized by the 2007 synod convention to elimi-

nate or reduce the synod's \$22.4 million dollar debt, concluded at the 2009 synod convention in July. About \$4.2 million has been gathered from 810 congregations and 2,800 individuals. In all, 63 percent of congregations synodwide have participated. The Year of Jubilee offering combined with regularly scheduled debt payments have reduced the debt to about \$14.6 million as of the end of June. The offerings will allow deferral of debt payment and accrual of interest for one year—and allow the debt to be re-amortized over ten years, reducing annual debt payments from \$2.7 million to \$1.6 million.

These updates are from the offices of the synod administration building at 2929 N Mayfair Rd, Milwaukee WI 53222-4398.

Q&A with Scott Schmudlach, member of WELS School Accreditation Task Force

In 2003 WELS Commission on Parish Schools established the WELS School Accreditation (WELSSA) process. Since then, 60 schools have been accredited, and 31 are working on school self-studies in order to receive accreditation.

According to Jeff Inniger, interim administrator of WELS Parish Schools, the self-study process is crucial to the accreditation process: "Going through the self-study portion of the process assists the school in taking a very close look at itself. The school identifies strengths that it can build on and areas that need improvement. A team of educators visits the school when the self-study portion of the process is completed. This team carefully examines the school self-study to validate its findings. The team then leaves the school with a series of commendations and recommendations."

Forward in Christ talked to Scott Schmudlach, a WELS principal who has completed the process and now serves on the WELS School Accreditation Task Force, to learn more about WELS School Accreditation.

Question – What is your current call?

Answer – I am principal and seventh- and eighth-grade teacher at Good Shepherd in Downers Grove, Ill.

Question – How are you involved with WELS School Accreditation?

Answer – Our school started the WELSSA process in 2005 and received accreditation in May 2006. My current involvement includes serving on the WELSSA Task Force.

Question – Why did Good Shepherd decide to begin the accreditation process?

Answer – The community our school serves has a high regard for quality education. Though our own school and church families know that we operate a quality school, the community is not familiar with the WELS school system. Accreditation demonstrates that our school strives to meet excellence.

Question – What impact did the process have on Good Shepherd?

Answer –

- It provided the "teeth" to initiate some needed changes.
- Our long-range plan has improvement objectives for each year.
- The school committee has become more involved in implementing new programs.
- Our enrollment has grown.
- Our teaching staff has a renewed interest and zeal for continuing education.

Question – Why have you become such a supporter of WELS School Accreditation?

Answer – WELSSA is a great way for a school to "take a look at itself in the mirror." Every school needs to recognize its strengths and weaknesses. WELSSA is a process that will encourage your school and congregation to build on those strengths and address those weaknesses.

Question – What do you believe the strengths of WELS School Accreditation are?

Answer –

- Developing a mission, vision, and objectives.

- Thoroughly examining all parts of your school's program from a Christian perspective.
- Developing and maintaining a long-range plan (7 years).
- WELSSA is accredited by a nationally recognized accrediting agency (NCPSA).
- The process involves a large number of people who are interested in the school's ministry to increase their knowledge and understanding of the school.
- The process helps a school recognize the multitude of blessings that it has received from our gracious Lord.
- WELSSA helps a school identify which areas of ministry it needs to work on so that it better serves the Lord, the congregation, and the community.

Question – What would you say to a school that's considering the process?

Answer – Things that are worthwhile don't always come easily. WELSSA is an ambitious undertaking but well worth it. Talk to other school leaders that have gone through the process. Most will say that the self-study was a lot of work. They will also say it was one of the best things their school has ever done.

Question – Anything else people should know?

Answer – School leaders shouldn't enter the WELSSA process just because they think it will make their enrollment

increase. Rather, a school should begin the process with the intent to make their school better. In so doing, an increase in enrollment may be a by-product, because accreditation will likely be helpful as a school encourages its congregation members to enroll their children. This would be especially helpful as WELS schools reach out to families in the community who are interested in their children receiving an excellent Christian education. Most important, the gospel of Jesus Christ will be advanced.

For more information, contact Jeff Inniger at 414-256-3220; jeff.inniger@sab.wels.net.



Scott Schmudlach

International teens participate in WELS youth rally

From July 8–11, more than 1,000 WELS teens gathered at Iowa State University in Ames, Iowa, to attend the 2009 WELS International Youth Rally. Teens and their youth group leaders came together at the rally for worship, education, fellowship, recreation, and service projects, all under the rally theme, “Follow the Path, lead the way!”

“This rally had teens from eight countries, which was a youth rally first and a really awesome thing,” notes Dr. Joel Nelson, former administrator for WELS Commission on Youth Discipleship. This year’s rally included 28 international attendees—12 from Canada, seven from Grenada, one from Pakistan, and eight children of world missionaries.

The WELS missionary teens participated in a panel discussion, which included time for them to explain what it’s like to live in another country and the challenges and opportunities that they face. The audience responded by giving them a standing ovation to thank them for serving the synod in world mission fields.

Erin Nitz, daughter of Malawi missionary Paul Nitz, says, “I decided to go to the youth rally because I thought it would be an adventure. I thought it would strengthen my faith and confidence in Christ. I’d definitely go again . . . and again . . . and again! It was a once-in-a-lifetime chance and so much fun! I’ll be wearing the ‘Follow the Path, lead the way’ T-shirts for a long, long time.”

Teens from Emanuel, New London, Wis., were blessed to participate closely at the rally with the teens from Grenada. Emanuel has adopted Grace, WELS’ congregation in Grenada,

since Grace’s beginning in 2000. Over the years, mission teams from Emanuel have traveled to Grenada to help with Grace’s outreach efforts. Emanuel’s members have also sent mission dollars and other supplies to Grace.

The youth rally presented Emanuel with another opportunity to assist Grace. Members of Emanuel helped seven of Grace’s teens attend the rally. This included paying for registration costs, hosting the teens at their homes before the rally, and transporting the teens to and from the rally site.

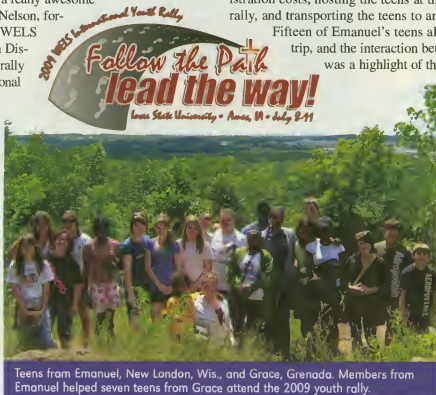
Fifteen of Emanuel’s teens also went along on the trip, and the interaction between the two groups was a highlight of the rally experience for both of them.

“Our youth shared openly how awesome it was to make friends from another culture who share the same faith as themselves,” says Jack Vande Guchte, staff minister at Emanuel, New London. “They are excited to have made new, lifelong friends—many have already been connecting through the Internet. They loved being able to talk so openly with each other about their faith and that these new friends will be in eternity with them.”

Steve Soukup, pastor at Grace, Grenada, told Emanuel’s members, “You have brought encouragement and hope to our people in Jesus’ name. You help

them see that they are part of a bigger thing, a family of Christ that crosses all barriers of status and culture.”

Visit www.wels.net/youthrally to learn more. See the commercials that youth groups created, hear some of the music sung at the rally, watch some of the presentations, and read what attendees have to say about their rally experiences.



Teens from Emanuel, New London, Wis., and Grace, Grenada. Members from Emanuel helped seven teens from Grace attend the 2009 youth rally.



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DVD shares message of Christ's work and our mission —

Highlighting the victory of Christ on the cross is just one of the goals of *Road to Emmaus*, a new DVD that portrays the discussion that Jesus could have had with the two disciples after his resurrection.

"Here in a simple 30-minute movie is an explanation of what the whole Bible is about—zeroing down to the core of what Christ has done for us and our mission," says Pastor Dave Kehl, administrator of Adult Discipleship.

According to Kehl, the idea came about after the Publication Coordinating Commission, a group of representatives from Northwestern Publishing House and WELS areas of ministry, decided it needed to focus its publishing efforts on a central message—Christ's victory on the cross and how we're involved in his mission to reveal that to the world.

Kehl, Pastor John Braun from Northwestern Publishing House, and Pastor Paul Hartman from Multi-Language Publications then came up with the idea to use the Emmaus story.



Bruce Marchiana (right) stars as Jesus in *Road to Emmaus*, a DVD that portrays the discussion that Jesus could have had with the two disciples after his resurrection.

"Here are two confused disciples going on the road to Emmaus," says Kehl. "Jesus comes and, beginning with Moses and the prophets, tells how the stories and the events of the Bible clarify why he had to suffer and die before he entered his glory."

According to Kehl, the movie is simple enough to use with those who have never heard of Christ but meaty enough for lifelong Christians. "This tool helps congregations grow so they can understand the context of the stories they've been learning," he says. "They can be thrilled at who they are because of what Christ has done. Then they can start seeing why they're here."

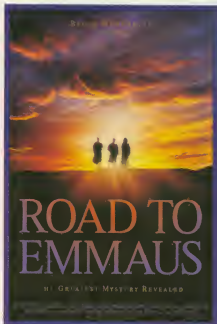
Plans are in place to offer versions of the movie in different languages for use in mission fields. The movie is already available in English and Spanish, so it can be used in U.S. cross-cultural fields.

Kehl says that other church bodies have also shown an interest, something he is excited about because of the film's Lutheran perspective. "It is Lutheran from start to finish in the key concern to clarify how Scripture unfolds what it means to be saved by grace alone, through faith alone, in

Christ alone," says Kehl.

Although no other additional material is available at this time, the DVD is hoped to be the first of many pieces that will follow this theme. Other pieces discussed include a 20-minute discussion piece on our mission as Christians to use following the movie, a Lenten series, a drama skit, a Bible story picture book, and a Bible information class.

The movie as well as the companion pieces are made possible from grants from the Publication Coordinating Commission, Thrivent Financial for Lutherans, and WELS Kingdom Workers.



MOVIE FACTS

Producers/Directors: Boettcher/Trinklein Television, Inc.

Location: Filmed entirely in Wisconsin, including scenes at the lime kilns in Grafton and a nature preserve in Mequon.

Starring as Jesus: Bruce Marchiano, the same actor who played Jesus in the *Matthew* video put out by The Visual Bible.

Also featuring: Simon Provan and Guy Holling as the disciples and members from area churches as extras.

Timeline: Filmed in two weeks in September 2008. Debuted at the 2009 synod convention.

Order from: Northwestern Publishing House, 1-800-662-6022; www.nph.net.
Web Site: www.roadtoemmamovie.com

District news

South Central

Voices of Victory, the choir of **Crown of Life, New Orleans, La.**, toured Wisconsin and Minnesota in July to thank WELS members for helping to rebuild Crown of Life's church, fellowship hall, parsonage, and many members' homes after Hurricane Katrina.

Western Wisconsin



The Organization of WELS Lutheran Seniors (OWLS) celebrated its 25th anniversary in Eau Claire, Wis., from July 6-9. OWLS members participated in worship, presentations, tours, and an anniversary banquet, at which original members of OWLS were recognized (pictured). At the anniversary celebration, OWLS fulfilled its goal of raising \$50,000 for the European Chaplaincy for 2008-2009 and committed to do the same in 2009-2010.

Western Wisconsin



WELS Summer Strings was started this summer in Watertown, Wis., to give orio string players an opportunity for group performance. More than 30 string players participated during this inaugural season, with ages ranging from 9 to 84.

In the news

The June 11 edition of the *Herald Tribune* in Sarasota, Fla., highlighted the growth of **Ascension Lutheran School**. In the article, Principal Kurt Rosenbaum, who recently took a call to Arizona Lutheran Academy, talked about the strict academic standards held by the school. He said, "Our mission is providing an education of excellence in a safe, Christian environment."

The July 11 *Watertown Public Opinion* featured a story on a Bible day camp for people with developmental disabilities in the Watertown, S.D., area. Volunteers from **St. Martin's and Bethlehem Lutheran Churches in Watertown, S.D.**, along with six college students participating in a Summer Ministry Experience through the Lutheran Home Association in Belle Plaine, Minn., hosted the camp. This camp is just one of the ways the college students shared the gospel with people with developmental disabilities this summer. One student remarked, "Words can't do justice to the experiences and lessons we have learned from working with them."

Nebraska



The Lutheran Women's Missionary Society held its 46th annual convention in Denver, Colo., from June 25-28. Attendees heard missionaries describe the outreach that WELS is supporting both here in North America and around the world. This year the LWMS distributed more than \$342,000 to WELS missions. Pictured are Apache women who attended the convention. WELS has supported mission work in Apache-land since 1893.

The district reporters for this month are: NE—Timothy Kennitz; SC—William Gabb; WW—Brett Brauer.

CHANGES IN MINISTRY

Pastors

Ahlers, Bruce E., to Our Savior, Sun City, Ariz.
 Bivens, David F., to Christ the Lord, Houston, Tex.

Buelow, Timothy H., to Faith (ELS), Carthage, Mo.

Cross, Larry E., to St. Paul, Clintonville, Wis.
 Enderle, Jeffrey D., to Beautiful Savior, Carlsbad, Calif.

Ewart, Matthew A., to Emmanuel, Tempe, Ariz.

Nuss, R. Stephen, to Christ the Lord, Clearwater, Fla.

Scharf, Ralph E., to retirement

Schleusener, Allen M., to Mt. Olive, Saint Paul, Minn.

Teachers

Chwarawsky, Alexandra E., to Wisconsin Lutheran College, Milwaukee, Wis.

Hackbarth, Jennifer L., to Salem Preschool, Woodbury, Minn.

Opsahl, Erhard P., to retirement

Rabe, Jodi L., to Gloria Dei, Grand Blanc, Mich.

Schuller, Mary K., to retirement

Techtmann, Janine H., to Bethany, Port Orchard, Wash.

Staff ministers

Chappell, Michael S., to Good Shepherd, Jacksonville, Fla.

Paynter, Ronald W., to St. Mark's, Watertown, Wis.

Martin Luther College assignments

Fritzer, Laura, to St. Paul, South Haven, Mich.

Zuehlke, Elisabeth, to Salem, Milwaukee, Wis.

Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary assignments

Feldhus, Patrick, to St. John, Cornell, Wis.

Hansen, Eric S., to St. Mark, De Pere, Wis.

Lee, Nau X., to First German (Hmong Ministry), Manitowoc, Wis.

Schoefer, Benjamin P., to First German, Manitowoc, Wis.

Schnake, Kevin, to Trinity, Omak, Wash.

Sprunger, Matthew J., to James Valley, Jamestown/St. Paul, Valley City, N.D.

Vik, Matthew T., to St. John, Wrightstown, Wis.

COLLOQUY NOTICE

Mark Story, formerly a pastor in the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, after having successfully completed the steps of our colloquy program, including study at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, was declared eligible for call into the ministry of our Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod.

James Huebner,
 WELS Second Vice President

Joel V. Petermann,
 North Atlantic District President

E. Allen Sorum,
 Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary professor

ANNIVERSARIES

Bellevue, Wash.—Calvary (50). Sept. 20. Worship, 9:30 A.M.; reunion gathering, 10:45 A.M. Sept. 27. Worship, 9:30 A.M.; picnic, 11:30 A.M.; organ recital, 3 P.M. Personal memories in picture or story received at www.calvarybellevue.shutterfly.com. Password: calvary.

Indianapolis, Ind.—Divine Savior (40). Sept. 20. Worship, 8 and 10:45 A.M.; meal to follow. James Schulz, schulzjg@sbcglobal.net.

Lake Geneva, Wis.—First (125). Sept. 20. Worship, 10 A.M.; catered meal to follow. 262-248-3374. Web site, www.firstlutheranwls.org.

Ria Rancho, N.M.—Peace (25). Sept. 27. Worship, 10 A.M.; meal to follow. RSVP requested by Aug. 31. Eric Ziecker, 505-891-8246; plcnm@juno.com.

Martian Grove, Ill.—Jerusalem school. Century of Christian education celebration. Oct. 9–11. Web site, www.jerusalem.lutheran.org/jels100.

Tacoma, Wash.—Faith School (50). Oct. 10. Worship, 4 P.M.; meal, 5:30 P.M. RSVP requested by Sept. 10. 253-537-2696; office@faith-wls.org.

Milwaukee, Wis.—St. Peter (150). Apr. 25, 2010. Worship, 10:30 A.M.; meal to follow at Serb Hall. RSVP requested. Elaine Metoxin, 414-764-8847.

COMING EVENTS

Camp Phillip—920-787-3202, office@campphillip.com.

- Sept. 4–7—Fall family camp
- Sept. 25–27—Teen retreat
- Oct. 2–4—Women's retreat
- Oct. 9–11—Scrapbooking retreat
- Oct. 16–18—Confirmation retreat
- Oct. 23–25—Work weekend
- Nov. 6–8—Quilting retreat

North Atlantic District Labor Day retreat—Sept. 5–7. Camp Taconic, Hinsdale, Mass. Judy Becker, 518-872-1372; judibeck5@aol.com. Web site, www.welslabordayretreat.org.

Quilters: An Evening at the Chapel—Sept. 11, 6 P.M. Wisconsin Lutheran Chapel, Madison, Wis. Food, fun, and networking. Pam Reichardt, 920-732-3656. Web site, www.wlchapel.org.

Christian Women's Retreat—Sept. 11–12. Grace, Lowell, Ariz. Theme: "Rooted in the Word." Harriet Johnson, 479-855-1608; harrij@cox.net.

Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Symposium—Sept. 21–22. Theme: "Congregational Health." Registration deadline, Sept. 1. Web site, www.wls.wisconsin.edu/sections/continuingeducation/symposium.

Annual Life Banquet—Sept. 27. Country Springs Hotel, Pewaukee, Wis. Hosted by Waukesha Chapter of WELS Lutherans for Life. Kathy Gates, 262-513-9590.

Annual Lutheran Ladies League rally—Sept. 30. Bethany, Manitowoc, Wis. Co-host, Grace, Manitowoc, Wis. Charlotte Endries, 920-682-2990.

Friends of the Seminary Day—Oct. 3, 8 A.M.–1 P.M. Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis. Lori Guse, 262-248-1104; gusel@wls.wisconsin.edu.

WELS Church Librarian's Organizational fall conference—Oct. 3, 9:30 A.M. Immanuel, Manitowoc, Wis. Betty or Howard Wilsman, 920-682-5351; jhbwilsmann511@sbcglobal.net.

Woman's Day Retreat—Oct. 3. Peace, 502 Orth Rd, Loves Park, Ill. Theme: "Got peace?" Web site, www.peaceevangelical.org.

Martin Luther College Ladies Auxiliary annual meeting—Oct. 14. Registration, 9 A.M.; meeting, 9:30 A.M. Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn., 507-354-8221. Web site, www.mlc-wls.edu.

Christian Life Resources "Back to Basics" conference—Nov. 7. St. Paul, Slinger, Wis. Cost: \$15, includes lunch. 800-729-9535. Web site, www.clirevents.com.

In the Footsteps of Paul study trip—Jan. 2–16, 2010. Hosts: Wisconsin Lutheran College, Milwaukee, Wis. and Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis. Tour sites include Ephesus, Aphrodisias, Sardis, Pergamum, Troas, Istanbul, Philippi, Thessaloniki, Delphi, Athens, and Corinth. Rome extension offered. Nonstudents welcome. Joel Pless, 414-443-8930, joel.pless@wlc.edu. Stephen Geiger, 262-242-8161, geigers@wls.wisconsin.edu.

Christian Woman Today retreat—Mar. 19–21, 2010. Olympia Resort, Oconomowoc, Wis. Theme: "Love each other as I have loved you." Maureen, 262-784-0412.

NAMES WANTED

Weatherford, Tex.—Second site for Abiding Faith, Fort Worth, Tex. Note Bourman, 817-845-6807; pastor.bourman@gmail.com. Web site, www.abidingfaithwest.com.

To place an announcement, call 414-256-3210; bulletinboard@wls.wisconsin.edu. Deadline is eight weeks before publication date.

Below, Paul Brown talks about taking walks with his grandson and exploring the wonders of God's world. Have you ever done that with a child? How about playing the alphabet game, using God's gifts in nature as the theme? Below are some examples. Can you (or your child/grandchild) finish the list? Try it sometime when you're walking and enjoying the great outdoors.

- | | |
|-----------------|---------------------|
| A ... Acorns | I ... Ivy |
| B ... Bees | J ... Jack rabbits |
| C ... Clouds | K ... Kelp |
| D ... Dirt | L ... Lakes |
| E ... Eggs | M ... Mountains |
| F ... Fireflies | N ... Nightcrawlers |
| G ... Grass | O ... Oak trees |
| H ... Heather | P ... Pine cones |



Wonders of God's world

Picture this



My daughter and her husband have given me the wonderful honor and joy to regularly assist in the care of my two-year-old grandson, Matthew. Each day I came to his house only a few blocks from ours. I usually drive my van. The first time I did this, he went directly to my front license plate. I have a plate that reads "JESUS IS THE ANSWER." Matthew began pointing his finger at each of the letters in Jesus. As he pointed to each letter (he's starting to learn them), I said, "J, E, S, U, S," and told him that spells Jesus, whose name he already knew. Now each day as we begin our daily "wanders of God's world" walk, he points to each letter. I say the name of each one and then ask him what those letters say. He answers, "Jesus," in his own special way. I then tell him each time, "Jesus loves you." Once he hears that, he is quite content, and we go on with our walk.

Submitted by Paul Brown, Clearwater, Florida

Send pictures to Picture this, *Forward in Christ*, 2929 N Mayfair Rd, Milwaukee WI 53222; fi@cwb.wels.net. On a separate sheet, give us information about the photo. Those whose photos are chosen will receive a small gift.

Even in an age of e-mail, God's law still guides us. Follow this imaginary conversation between a granddaughter and grandfather that shows us how God's law applies to all generations.

Dear Grandpa,

Mckenna is my very best friend. I think you met her when you and Grandma were here in July. We talk about everything—even God. Although Mckenna doesn't believe there is a God. That's the way she's been raised. Even though Mckenna isn't religious, she's still my best friend. She has high morals—unlike most of the kids in my school. So will God send Mckenna to hell because she's not a believer? That would be so unfair.

I love you,
Denali

The First

The First Commandment:
You shall have no other gods.

What does this mean?

We should fear, love, and trust in God above all things.

Dear Denali,

I remember Mckenna. A sweet and thoughtful young woman. I believe you when you say she's more moral than most of the kids in your school. I couldn't imagine you being friends with anyone who isn't. I'm glad she's a friend of yours and you a friend of hers.

I'm going to answer your question about Mckenna and heaven or hell in a few lines. First let's talk about you and me. There is a problem the two of us have with God. A big problem. A problem we can't solve.

The God who created the universe and keeps it in place moment by moment insists on perfection. That's because he is perfect, and he won't settle for less from us.

Suppose you were babysitting for the family down the street. The kids are playing outside, and you have to go in the house to care for the littlest one. You're gone just a couple minutes. In the meantime, the two older kids find a greasy, sticky mud hole. By the time you come back, they are covered head-to-toe with goo. Would you let them back in the house like that—especially if your neighbor was a meticulous housekeeper who decorated everything in white? Can you imagine the mess of having those human mud balls bouncing through that house?

When we stand before God, we are those mud balls.

You know the passage Romans 3:10: "There is no one righteous, not even one." (That thought is so important it's also written in Psalm 14:1-3, Psalm 53:1-3, and Ecclesiastes 7:20.) Our sins cover us with goo. In fact, even the good things we do are so muddled by our sinfulness that God judges them "filthy rags" (Isaiah 64:6). So why would the God of snow-white holiness let us into his presence?

You know the Bible's answer. Jesus describes how on the Last Day he will say to everyone standing before him with sin-mucked lives, "I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!" (Matthew 7:23).

That's the insurmountable problem we have with God. We can never



Commandment

live up to what he demands. We continually fall short. In fact, we don't even want to try to stay out of the mud. "The sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so" (Romans 8:7). We choose to frolic in the grime and slime—every time. No more than ice can avoid being cold can we avoid being sinful.

You, I—and Mckenna—are all in the same muddy mess. When just a speck of sin would be enough to exclude us from God's sinless presence, we show up at the door oozing with "sinfulness." We're oozing because our sin isn't just on the outside. It's through and through. Human nature remains the same as before the flood when "the LORD saw how great man's wickedness on the earth had become, and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time" (Genesis 6:5).

Now to your question. Would it be unfair for God to send Mckenna to hell? Would it be unfair for God to send me to hell? you? Hell is actually what we all deserve. Hell forever would be fair—for all of us.

Sure, we can compare ourselves to others and notice that some have more of that mud in more places than we do. But even if we could win the argument that we are caked with less of that mess than others, we all have far too much goo to escape God's angry punishment.

Back to your babysitting. You wouldn't let those mud balls into the house. What you would do is get their grimy clothes off; wash the kids thoroughly; and put fresh, clean clothes on them. Then they could come into the house.

God has done exactly that for us. He washed away our faults and failures when Jesus died on the cross. "The blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin" (1 John 1:7). He has dressed us in Jesus' perfection. Now he sees us as "without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless" (Ephesians 5:27). Through Jesus he welcomes us into his heart and into his heaven. But this cleansing comes only through Jesus. When we trust Jesus, we receive his cleansing. Without trust in Jesus, we remain muddy and dirty.

Since the God of Christmas and Easter has given us all this, it only makes sense that his First Commandment is *You shall have no other gods*. How disrespectful to trust another god—or no god—when only the God we know through Jesus provides forgiveness. "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we may be saved" (Acts 4:12).

So the people who claim that any religion leads to God are calling God a liar and reject his plan to

wash away sin. The people who deny God or who are uncertain if there is a God also say "No, thanks" to the Savior who God alone has provided for all humanity. The same can be said for the people who trust that they are good enough for God. The Lord says, "There is no God apart from me, a righteous God and a Savior; there is none but me" (Isaiah 45:21). The ultimate contempt for God is not to acknowledge that he is God and Savior.

There's another reason I am glad you are friends with Mckenna. God has made you friends so you can help her get to know him. Keep praying for Mckenna to come to faith, for opportunities to speak with her about Jesus, and for other Christians to do the same. Continue to speak up about what you believe. Patiently help Mckenna understand why Jesus is so important to you, why you "fear, love, and trust in God above all things." Show her the same kind of gentle love you've found in Jesus. Show her that, as much as the two of you value your friendship, having Jesus as a friend is much more important.

I love you,
Grandpa

James Aderman is pastor at Fairview, Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

This is the second article in a ten-part series on the Ten Commandments. To read other articles in the series, go to www.forwardinchrist.net and search by the author's first and last name.



GOD STUCK

A soldier's faith is tested after he experienced bombings in Iraq.

The date was April 2, 2007. Daniel Rowe had been in Iraq for only a few months when his squad was pulling security at the Major Crimes Unit. "We had been there for an hour when a large truck bomb blew up 20 feet in front of my truck," says Daniel. The explosion demolished his truck and nearby buildings and killed his gunner, Bryan. It also killed a group of schoolgirls who had just been dismissed for the day. "I was in the same truck when this happened, and I walked away unscathed," says Daniel.

When the explosion happened, Daniel admits he already had a shaky faith. After graduating in 2003 from Wisconsin Lutheran High School, Milwaukee, he joined the army and was stationed at Fort Riley, Kansas. There he became friends with many atheists. "They joked about religion all the time," says Daniel. "I also did not have a lot of people that I could share my religion with."

Then Daniel deployed to Iraq, and his faith continued to weaken. "My roommate was an atheist, and his constant putting down of religion got me thinking," he says.

That thinking led to his reaction after the blast. "I blamed myself at the time for what had happened and also blamed God for letting it happen," he says. Eventually he stopped blaming himself because he realized he had no control over the situation. "Even though I stopped blaming myself, I still blamed God."

Not even five months later, a rocket hit his unit's supply. "I was over in the area when it happened, and I ran to help," says Daniel. He soon discovered that his new gunner was in the building and had lost his legs. "I had just lost my second gunner this deployment and did not understand why everything was happening to me," he explains. "After the attack, I was about done with God. My faith had taken just about all that it could."

He didn't know then that his faith was about to take more. Two months later, while driving to the Major Crimes Unit, he was entering a traffic circle when an IED blew up in front of his truck. (IEDs are improvised explosive devices—bombs fashioned out of whatever explosive materials are available and whatever makes suitable shrapnel.) "All that happened this time was that it cracked my windshield and broke a headlight," he says.

That was the last straw for Daniel. "All these bad things happened to me, and I blamed God. I did not understand why God would do something like that to me," he says. So

he did what his friends were doing and became an atheist. "I believed there could be no God if all these bad things were happening in Iraq," he explains. "I didn't have faith in anything."

Then, while Daniel was still in Iraq, a friend saw the changes in him and intervened. "She noticed how bad of shape I was in. She talked with me about what made me lose my faith and how God was with me even though I did not believe in God at the time," says Daniel. "She had me watch a video about how God is with us in tough times, and it was exactly what I needed. She put me back on track with the Lord."

Daniel then read Psalm 94:17-19: "Unless the LORD had given me help, I would soon have dwelt in the silence of death. When I said 'My foot is slipping,' your love, O LORD, supported me. When anxiety was great within me, your consolation brought joy to my soul." This gave him new insights into his experiences.

"Once my head was straight," says Daniel, "I realized that when my faith was slipping, God stayed with me. He kept me safe every time a new situation arose. All of these bad things kept happening to me, but I walked away from it every time."

He thought back to the first bombing. That day his squad was having communications problems and ended up leaving much later than usual. "If my squad would have left on time, there would have been a lot of soldiers outside their trucks talking and smoking, which would have ultimately led to more casualties," says Daniel. "I don't know if us being late was the work of God, but I like to think he used it to keep me and my squad safe—even though most are atheists."

Daniel then thought back to the rocket attack and saw God's protecting hand in that situation too. "I was supposed to be in the supply at that time, but the soldier I was to go with was talking to someone in the vehicle maintenance bay. He took longer than he should have, which kept me there instead of in the office where the rocket hit."

Since then, Daniel has been reading the Bible again. He really likes Deuteronomy 31:8: "The LORD himself goes before you and will be with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged."

"I realized that during all these situations, God was with me. Even when I was losing faith, God stuck with

WITH ME

Linda R. Buxa

me," he says. "I now know that it was not God's fault for what was happening in my life."

That doesn't mean Daniel's life is challenge free now. As a member of the Army Reserves, he still meets people who make fun of his faith. He also travels for the Reserves and is moving from Wisconsin to Texas, both of which haven't given him many opportunities to attend church regularly. This time, however, he is taking steps to protect his faith. "I keep people that I know that are Christians around me," says Daniel. "I also talk a lot with my grandpa." As a former marine, his grandpa understands the challenges of military life. As a lifelong believer, his grandpa also knows it can be hard to keep a strong faith. Daniel says, "He tells me, 'If you're not going to church, make sure you're reading your Bible. Remember that Jesus is always there for you.'"

The lessons Daniel has learned haven't come easy. Still, God makes another promise in 1 Peter 1:6,7: "For a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed."

Daniel now looks at all those griefs and trials, which initially carried him farther from the Lord, as something that God used for good. "These situations were by far the worst things that have ever happened to me," he explains, "but in the end they helped strengthen my faith even more."

Linda Buxa is a member at St. Mark's, Citrus Heights, California.

People in the military sometimes have to work harder to stay—or grow—in their faith. Check out www.wels.net/military to learn how WELS is serving those who are serving their country. You'll find articles, devotions, and a list of congregations with online worship services. You can also sign up or refer military members for mailings containing devotions, sermons, and prayers.

You can also learn more about a Spiritual Deployment Kit, available through Northwestern Publishing House—www.nph.net. This inexpensive kit contains a pocket-sized New Testament Bible with Psalms and Proverbs, devotional booklets, a letter from the National Civilian Chaplain, and information from the Military Services Committee and Time of Grace Ministry.



Mark Schwaben

Be a Berean

Searching the Scriptures, reading and studying the Bible, and personally digging into God's Word is a natural response among those who have heard the good news of Jesus and want to know more. Even those Christians in Berea, who had the benefit of personal instruction and preaching of the apostle Paul himself, responded to his instruction by looking to the Scriptures with great eagerness. "[The Bereans] received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day" (Acts 17:11).

Certainly we grow in the grace and knowledge of God as his Word is preached and proclaimed in our worship. There, through the reading of Scripture and sermon, God's Word is spoken, God's people listen, and the Spirit works. But another important means to grow in our knowledge of what God has said and done is in our congregations' Bible classes. The time gathered around the Word with fellow Christians beyond the worship service can greatly influence the spiritual life and health of individual believers and entire congregations.

Bible class, of course, can take many different forms. Most familiar is the class on Sunday morning before or after worship services. Some congregations offer midweek Bible classes at church or conduct more informal Bible studies in a variety of settings away from the church building. Regardless of where, when, and how it takes place, as God's people gather around his Word, he keeps his promise to help them grow stronger in their faith, grow deeper in their knowledge, and to be better equipped to live as Christian disciples and witnesses.

Bible classes also offer a rich variety of study opportunities. Perhaps a class is an

in-depth study of the book of Revelation or Paul's letter to the Ephesians. It may center on a series of Bible events such as the mission journeys of Paul or God's formation of his chosen nation of Israel from Egypt to the Promised Land. A Bible class may involve a detailed examination of important biblical doctrines such as justification by faith, the work of the Holy Spirit, or various teachings summarized by one of the Lutheran Confessions. And there are the opportunities to study timely topics that apply to everyday situations faced by Christians as they live their faith in today's world.

It's interesting to note that the percentage of WELS adults involved in organized Bible study has tripled since 1968. At that time, just over 4 percent of our members attended some type of Bible class; today the percentage is 12 percent. That increase is certainly an encouraging development. On the other hand, 12 percent is a number that offers a lot of opportunity for growth and improvement.

September is when most congregations make the transition back to their full schedule of activities. It's probably safe to say that new Bible studies will be starting soon in your congregation. If you are someone who has attended Bible class in the past, I would encourage you to do so again. Your faith will benefit, and your knowledge of God's Word will grow. If you are someone who has not attended Bible class before, I would encourage you to give it a try. It can be a time for you to ask questions; to benefit from the insights of your fellow believers; and, most important, to be like one of those Christians in Berea who received God's message with great eagerness and searched the Scriptures with joy.



believe in the HOLY SPIRIT

The Holy Spirit grows our faith. Charles F. Degner

How can you believe and not believe at the same time? Mark writes about a man who came to Jesus in desperation. His son was possessed by an evil spirit that seemed bent on destroying his precious son.

"Jesus asked the boy's father, 'How long has he been like this?'"

" 'From childhood,' he answered. 'It has often thrown him into fire or water to kill him. But if you can do anything, take pity on us and help us.' "

" ' "If you can"? ' said Jesus. 'Everything is possible for him who believes.' "

"Immediately the boy's father exclaimed, 'I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!' " (9:21-24).

The old self struggles against the new self

You can pray this man's prayer every day. You believe, but you are also guilty of unbelief. You see this in yourself when hardship leads you to wonder if God loves you. You see it when you face death and are afraid. You see it when you struggle to overcome a sin in your life and find yourself powerless to make the changes you desire. "Lord, I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!"

Our good and merciful Father has not left you to face the unbelief of your sinful nature alone. Paul writes:

"Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed—not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence—continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose" (Philippians 2:12,13). This passage seems to contain a contradiction. First Paul encourages you to work out your salvation. Then he tells you that it is God who works in you both to will and to act.

As long as you keep in mind that you have a new self and an old self, you can understand what Paul is saying. Your new self trusts God and is motivated by God's love to live according to his will. Your new self desires to hear and learn God's Word. And your new self always struggles against sin in your life.

However, you never lose your old self entirely. You drown it every day with tears of sorrow and repentance. It is like the crab grass in your garden. You never get rid of it. You just keep pulling weeds to keep them under control. It is the same with keeping your old self under control.

The Holy Spirit helps battle the old self

You need the Holy Spirit's help. You cannot overcome sin by yourself. It is God who works in you both to will and to act according to his purpose. "Lord, I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!"

The Ninety-five Theses that Martin Luther posted on the church door in Wittenberg began with this: "When our Lord and Master Jesus Christ said, 'Repent' (Matthew 4:17), he willed the entire life of believers to be one of repentance." We struggle to work out our salvation in godly lives every day by daily repentance.

The ongoing work of the Holy Spirit in your heart helps you battle sin. Paul writes: "I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being" (Ephesians 3:16).

"I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!"

Contributing editor Charles Degner is pastor at St. Peter, St. Peter, Minnesota.

This is the fourth article in an eight-part series on the Third Article of the Apostles' Creed. Go to www.forwardinchrist.net and search by the author's first and last name to read other articles in the series.

THE ONGOING WORK
OF THE HOLY SPIRIT
IN YOUR HEART HELPS
YOU BATTLE SIN.



Packaging God

Men and women throughout history have had trouble trying to conceive of God and what he does. When God seems to need our help, we invent a new Bible passage. "God helps those who help themselves" is one most people think comes from the Bible. It doesn't.

God has come down to us and given us a clear revelation of himself. But instead of taking God at his word, we like a neat little package we can handle and manipulate. We prefer to put God on a shelf, dust him off when we need him, sprinkle a little theology on our lives, and then put him back on the shelf until next time. It's convenient and trouble free.

Of course, basically you don't need that kind of god. The world understands that. He becomes just a crutch to get you through the troubled times. Atheists are right when they say that such a god is just superstitious, wishful thinking and unnecessary.

We know better. The apostle John describes us as "dear children . . . from God" (1 John 4:4). It wasn't that way originally. Because of our sinful nature, we were opposed to God—his enemies, not his children. We thought like the rest of the world. But God's grace in Christ has made us his children—adopted and changed.

Interestingly, John says that because we are God's children, we listen to God's message. Yet so many around us don't see the value of listening to God. For them, it makes more sense to sit and read the newspaper or camp with the family rather than to go and hear God's Word. John suggests, "They are from the world and therefore speak from the viewpoint of the world, and the world listens to them" (1 John 4:5).

So what is the viewpoint of the world? Click on the TV and pay attention. The

world is focused on ego, power, control, gratification, money, and pleasure. It's hard to find anything else. The world's viewpoint has no horizon beyond what anyone can see or imagine. For the world, God, if he is needed at all, is in his little package, which, they think, is relatively unimportant.

We have a different vision. As children of God, our viewpoint starts with believing in Jesus Christ. We treasure forgiveness, life, and salvation. We also understand that God's power is hidden in the gospel—a power that has brought us to faith and that keeps us in faith. If we want to grow as Christians and if we want our churches to grow, using God's power—the gospel—is essential.

So why do we sometimes want to package God without Jesus and present him to the world without forgiveness, the cross, the empty tomb, and eternal life? Is it to attract others to our church? Is it because we want to be like the world? Is it because we are embarrassed by the bold and exclusive claims of Jesus? Can we grow the church by presenting a vague God of love and using all kinds of strategies and techniques the world seems to think will work?

Genuine Christianity is not mainstream. People who share the world's viewpoint are sometimes wary of Christians. To them the cross is still an offense. Children of God and those of the world have different viewpoints. We are in this world *but* not of it.

God is powerful in the way he promised—through the gospel. That is not an excuse for Christians to do nothing. Jesus asks us to be faithful, energetic witnesses of the gospel. When we listen to him and depend on his power, not ours, he can do so much more than we imagine.

THE APOSTLES

Jonathan E. Schroeder

Paul: The apostle to the Gentiles

He was the church's worst nightmare. Persecuting and prosecuting, assaulting and arresting—these were the tools of Saul's trade. The murderous threats he breathed out against the disciples had been underscored by the killing of Stephen. Yes, long before he was called Paul, this man Saul warred against Christianity. But one day, on the road to Damascus, the Savior appeared in order to call this man to faith and service as the great apostle of grace to the Gentiles.

READ ACTS 9:1-9, 15-19

"Meanwhile, Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples. He went to the high priest and asked him for letters to the synagogues in Damascus, so that if he found any there who belonged to the Way, whether men or women, he might take them as prisoners to Jerusalem. As he neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, 'Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?'"

"Who are you, Lord?" Saul asked.

"I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting," he replied.

"Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do."

"The men traveling with Saul stood there speechless; they heard the sound but did not see anyone. Saul got up from the ground, but when he opened his eyes he could see nothing. So they led him by the hand into Damascus. For three days he was blind, and did not eat or drink anything. . . .

"But the Lord said to Ananias, 'Go! This man is my chosen instrument to carry my name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel. I will show him how much he must suffer for my name.'"

"Then Ananias went to the house and entered it. Placing his hands on Saul, he said, 'Brother Saul, the Lord—Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you were coming here—

has sent me so that you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit.'" "Immediately, something like scales fell from Saul's eyes, and he could see again. He got up and was baptized, and after taking some food, he regained his strength."

DIGGING INTO THE VERSES

1. Read Philippians 3:4-14 for an autobiography of Paul. What kind of man was Paul?
2. Read Acts 8:1-3 and then look again at Acts 9:1,2. How do Paul's actions fit with the character profile outlined in question 1?
3. For all his zeal and energy "for God," what was his relationship with God?
4. When Jesus spoke to him, he said, "Saul, Saul, . . ." Look up these other instances when the Bible speaks like that: Luke 10:41; Matthew 23:37; Luke 22:31; 2 Samuel 19:4. What emotion was Christ conveying to Saul?
5. Read Acts 9:5. What two truths assault Saul's heart and soul? Are Jesus' words law or gospel?
6. Jesus sent Ananias to preach the gospel to Saul. What does that teach you about Jesus and about ministry?
7. Saved by grace, Paul was converted and baptized. How is the conversion of Paul similar to your conversion?

MORE ABOUT PAUL

The book of Acts outlines in great detail Paul's later ministry to the Gentiles, as do the epistles he wrote. History tells us that after decades of service to Christ, Paul suffered a martyr's death in Rome under Emperor Nero. The commemoration of his death and that of Peter falls on June 29. The church celebrates the Feast of the Conversion of St. Paul on Jan. 25 each year. The First Lesson for that festival is Acts 9:1-19.

Contributing editor Jonathan Schroeder is pastor at Faith, Sharpsburg, Georgia.

This is the eleventh article in a 12-part series on Jesus' apostles. Find this study and answers online after Sept. 5 at www.forwardinchrist.net



ENDLESS VACATION

Unfinished obligations of yesterday and daunting responsibilities of tomorrow meet their end in Jesus, who takes them on.

Daron J. Lindemann

ne summer day I couldn't find the silverware drawer. I stood in my kitchen and turned in a complete circle while eyeing various possibilities. On my second attempt, I tugged on the drawer with the contents I needed.

That same day I forgot my laptop password. I also hesitated a few extra seconds when figuring out how to shift my car into reverse. This lapse in performing routine tasks amused me much more than it alarmed me. I had just returned from a week's vacation. My brain had been detached from its routines.

That's full relaxation!

The "rest" of vacation arrived like a welcome friend at a party. But when it was over, I had more cleanup than I wanted. The volume of e-mail messages in my inbox was shouting for attention. The lawn needed mowing, the garden weeding. Schedules I could forget about on vacation became pressing and important again. Then there was mail sorting and luggage to unpack.

Not only were these chores suffering badly from vacation deprivation, but I also felt the pressure of deadlines looming just ahead. One by itself wasn't bad, but the sum total of tasks ganged up to overwhelm me with fear and frustration.

For a brief moment I wished I hadn't gone on vacation. On second thought, I wished I had stayed on vacation!

Some think of life without stress as a reward from a god for the good they've done. For others who don't look devoutly to any god at all, it's the goal of life. At times they enjoy the smooth sailing of personal achievements or accolades, satisfying relationships, or simply the fulfillment of daily needs without the interruption of serious setbacks. Life is good!

But most know stress. Deadlines approach. Unresolved guilt returns in yet another form. Within a day, sometimes even less, the happy-go-lucky person finds herself buried miserably in stress or immerses himself in irresponsible workaholism. And the only answer lies hopelessly in the source of the problem: oneself.

I believed my Savior's relentless love held the answer to my postvacation fears and frustrations. At the same time, sinful thoughts still led me to consider I'd never get out of this mess until I worked it all out myself. It didn't take long to reach the ultimate conclusion: another vacation!

This time it would be an endless vacation. "For anyone who enters God's rest also rests from his own work" (Hebrews 4:10).

The joy brought by totally disengaging on a relaxing vacation blessed me in body and spirit. I came to realize that I was looking for this same joy after vacation—but joy has many faces. Its vacation face doesn't necessarily smile on the day-in, day-out routines and rhythms of work weeks, family busyness, and household chores. And that's okay. Believers can enjoy a better vacation for those days, or any days, in God's Sabbath: our Savior Jesus.

Jesus is not potential rest. Jesus is not a ceremonial law that, if obeyed properly enough, gives us rest. Jesus is real rest. Nothing needs to bother those who cast their cares on him. Jesus takes guilt that demands the soul to work overtime, and he transfers it to his cross, where he did all the work to gain forgiveness. Unfinished obligations of yesterday and daunting responsibilities of tomorrow meet their end in Jesus, who takes them on.

Resting in Jesus I just can't seem to find the worry drawer or remember the password to hopelessness or shift gears into irritable stress. This is my endless vacation.

Daron Lindemann is pastor at Grace, Milwaukee, Wisconsin.